

Death Valley Ranch Barn (Stables)  
Death Valley National Monument  
Inyo County  
California

HABS No. CA-2257 D

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CAL  
H-DVNM,  
I-D-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DEATH VALLEY RANCH BARN  
(Scotty's Castle, Stables)

HABS No. CA-2257 D

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CA,  
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Location: National Park Service Route 5 (commonly known as the North Highway), 25 miles west of the junction of U.S Route 85 with Nevada State Route 267 (commonly known as Scotty's Junction), Death Valley National Monument, Inyo County, California.

Present Owner: National Park Service.

Present Use: New Barn/Shed: Exhibit space for the automobiles, trucks and power equipment owned and operated by Albert Mussey Johnson. Also lumber storage and electrical shop for the National Park Service.

Old Barn/Stable: Electrical and plumbing supply storage, curatorial storage, maintenance and carpentry shop, and workers' locker room.

Significance: This large stable and storage complex was one of the first major construction projects that followed the massive remodeling of the Main House. Its decoratively stuccoed exterior and red tiled roof maintained the Spanish Mediterranean motif established in the remodeling of the Main House.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Note: For general information on the Death Valley Ranch complex, see HABS No. CA-2257.

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection:

1924 - Original barn designed by Johnson.<sup>1</sup>  
By 1926 - Original barn constructed.<sup>2</sup>  
By August 1927 - MacNeilledge designed Barn remodeling and additions.<sup>3</sup>  
January 1928 - New Barn practically completed.<sup>4</sup>  
By March 1929 - Remodeling of Old Barn practically complete.<sup>5</sup>

2. Architect: Albert M. Johnson - Original Barn  
Charles A. MacNeilledge - Remodeling and additions

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

Albert Mussey Johnson: ca. 1926-1948  
The Gospel Foundation: 1948-1970  
National Park Service: 1970-Present

4. Builder, suppliers:

General superintendent: M. Roy Thompson

Building superintendent: H. B. Brown

Manufacturer of barn gate hinges: Julius Dietzmann's  
Ironworks, Los Angeles, California.<sup>6</sup>

Manufacturer of hand-wrought decorative gate fittings: Rubens  
Carascelli.<sup>7</sup>

5. Original plans and construction:

An earlier corrugated sheet metal structure as designed by Johnson in November of 1924 and built soon thereafter was called the "Stable." This term was still in use, although less frequently, long after MacNeilledge had prepared architectural drawings that specifically labeled both the north and south wings of the upcoming construction project as "New Barn" and "Old Barn" respectively.

The "New Barn" was planned from the outset to be one great open space specifically intended for storage. For that reason and because there would be no doors leaving it open to the air it was commonly referred to as the "Shed." The "Old Barn" had a room within it that MacNeilledge's plans labeled the "Stable." It was in this room that some mules were actually housed. All the horses were left to run free outside in the corral. In 1929 almost all the livestock were taken down to the Lower Vine Ranch, where they could live directly off the land and therefore save Johnson the expense of buying feed for them. Only some riding stock were left at the Upper Ranch.<sup>8</sup>

As the remodeling of the previous structure progressed, the term "Stable" was used less frequently, while the term "Barn" became more common. Today the entire complex is almost always referred to as the "Stables" and almost never as the "Barn."

The New Barn, or the Shed as it was commonly referred to, was built in 1927-28 and in great haste because it was needed for storage. There was a tremendous amount of building supplies and materials on order, in particular six train carloads of cement, that were necessary for the projects scheduled for the immediate future, and no place to protect them properly.<sup>9</sup>

Once the New Barn was completed, the pre-existing corrugated sheet metal structure, designed by Johnson in November of 1924 and built before 1926, was remodeled into its present form<sup>10</sup> and called the "Old Barn." There are at least three drawings signed by Johnson and dated November 16, 1924, in the Reference Library at Scotty's Castle that are plans for a stable.<sup>11</sup> Unlike any of the other projects overseen by Thompson, there is little in the correspondence and the photographs sent by him to Johnson recounting the construction of this building. This seems to indicate that the original structure must have been started, and probably substantially finished, before Thompson became General Superintendent in October of 1925.

There is one photograph dated 1926 that shows the south side of this corrugated sheet metal building.<sup>12</sup> The photograph shows the stable with a central passage twice as wide as it is now and with no doors. A second photograph dated February 2, 1927, shows the west side of the original stable in the distant right background.<sup>13</sup> This photo reveals that the whole side was left open with no walls or doors.

Correspondence between Johnson and MacNeilledge reveals that Johnson strongly disapproved of MacNeilledge's first scheme to lower the ridge of the original barn to match that of the new addition. Instead Johnson preferred making the addition match the original and in that way save on the expense of reframing this interior.<sup>14</sup> There are two sets of drawings by MacNeilledge for the Barn complex: one dated 1927 and a second dated 1929, the second probably conforming more closely to what Johnson preferred.<sup>15</sup> The second and later set makes note that the remodeling of the older structure should retain the original window and door openings. Except for some minor changes, in both cases the plan by MacNeilledge follows almost exactly the plan for the original stable as designed by Johnson in 1924.<sup>16</sup> All this seems to point to the fact that most, if not all, of the original foundation, wood framing and interior partitioning was incorporated into the later structure. Only a smaller shed-roofed open air shelter on the west side was added anew. It was probably necessary architecturally so that the west ends of both the New and Old Barn were on line with each other and could each support one side of the west gate.

Along with the remodeling of the "Old Barn," a flat connecting roof with tiled parapets and large rounded arches was strung across from roof to roof at the east end, forming a covered driveway, in order to unite the parallel structures and have them read as a single structure. A very similar scheme was used in the remodeling design of the Main House Annex by adding a connecting footbridge toward the center and large arches and decorative gates toward the front and rear of a central throughway.

The later phases of the building's construction were not accomplished with the same sense of urgency since other projects (i.e., Guest House, Music Room, etc.) were determined to have a greater priority. Not until the summer of 1929 were all barn doors hung and November of the same year the Main Gates installed.<sup>17</sup>

6. Alterations and additions:

In July 1975 a water main shut-off was installed just south of the Barn to control the flow of water into the entire complex.<sup>18</sup>

In May 1983 a concrete pad was laid to the east of the Barn. In the following June two 2000-gallon propane tanks were installed.<sup>19</sup>

New Barn/Shed: In December 1979 - February 1980 the garage doors that were removed from the Garage/Motel were utilized as a free-standing partition on line with the west arch of the connecting roof. All the interior space east of the "garage door wall" was given a cement floor and is presently used by the National Park Service as lumber storage. In addition a smaller area within that was partitioned with gray-painted plywood for use as an electrical shop, formerly located three miles to the west at the Grapevine Maintenance Shop. A window was removed to accommodate an air conditioner. Nothing is permanent and all the work was done with the intention that it be reversible and could be undone when it became necessary or advisable.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1977 the area to the north and east of the New Barn was re-excavated after a great deal of sand and gravel had been deposited there by a flash flood. What was originally below grade and never stuccoed is now exposed.<sup>21</sup>

Old Barn/Stable: What was originally the lumber room was adapted by the National Park Service in 1977-78 into a Maintenance Shop and Workers' Locker Room. At the same time concrete slab floors were added to this room and to the small dependency to the west. A free-standing plywood loft was introduced in the larger room in order to maximize storage and work space. The original sliding wood doors from the Annex Garage were used to form the north wall of the shelter.<sup>22</sup>

In 1985 the east and west harness rooms were adapted for use as a Curatorial Storage Facility. Ceilings were insulated with foam to modulate temperature and humidity fluctuations. Free-standing plywood lofts, shelves and cabinetry were introduced in order to maximize storage capacity. A great deal of consideration was given to making sure no permanent damage was done to historic fabric.<sup>23</sup>

Covered Driveway: In September 1977 foam was sprayed on the roof in order to make it waterproof.<sup>24</sup>

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This large barn/stable complex was one of the first major building projects following the extensive remodeling of the Main House and the first outbuilding to have a Spanish Mediterranean styling motif. The Barn's exterior stucco treatment, red clay-tiled roofs and emphasis on "antiqued" wood trim and ornate metal work maintained the stylistic theme established by its predecessor. The basic scheme of uniting two parallel structures separated by a wide central throughway bounded by ornate front and rear gates, and connecting the two structures toward the center with a strong architectural element, either a roof or a footbridge, so that they read as a single building is also repeated here.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. Exterior stucco finish is cracked and peeling badly in some areas. It is particularly bad on the north side of the New Barn due to the proximity of the building to the embankment and the drainage runoffs that ensue. Some window panes on the south side are broken, some are missing; some are now boarded over.

### B. Description of Exterior:

#### 1. Over-all dimensions:

New Barn/Shed: 100' x 36'.

Old Barn/Stable: 136' x 36'.

Covered Driveway: 45' x 35'. At the northeast corner there is a cylindrical dovecote with conical roof.

#### 2. Foundations:

New Barn/Shed: Concrete footings.

Old Barn/Stable: Concrete perimeter foundation on stone footings.

#### 3. Walls:

New Barn/Shed: Concrete walls covered with a brown and beige stucco to simulate a weathered adobe.

Old Barn/Stable: Wood frame stud construction, infilled with "insulex" and given a brown and beige stucco finish to simulate a weathered adobe.

Covered driveway: Arches have wood frame construction covered with brown and beige stucco finish.

4. Structural system, framing:

New Barn/Shed: Load-bearing exterior concrete walls and five roof trusses on 18' centers.

Old Barn/Stable: Wood frame stud construction with seven roof trusses on 18' centers.

Covered driveway: Flat roof with cable and bracket support system.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

New Barn/Shed: Four large round-arched portals on the south side. Three are evenly spaced and face the open air courtyard and the fourth is centered under the covered driveway. The west facade has a doorway of similar size and shape. Unlike the others it has a wooden door painted a pale yellow color.

Old Barn/Stable: All wood trim is made of redwood, most of which has been "antiqued" by scorching with an alcohol blow torch and by gouging the surface with a chisel. Plank wood for most of the doors has been joined with tongue-and-groove construction and fastened with hand-forged metal strap hinges on the outside and wooden battens on the inside. Four double-leaf doors, two on the north, one on the south, and a fourth on the west facade, slide along interior tracks and have keyhole-like cut-outs at eye level. The east facade has swinging double-leaf doors with extended hand-forged metal strap hinges.

b. Windows:

New Barn/Shed: The north facade has five evenly spaced six-light metal casement windows. The easternmost has been removed to accommodate an air conditioner. The west facade has a six-light metal casement window and a circular wooden louver in the peak of the gable end. The east facade also has a six-light metal casement window.

Old Barn/Stable: The south facade has six evenly spaced windows. Each has a pair of swinging casement windows with wood sashes. Some of these retain their original frosted glazing.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

New Barn/Shed: Gable roof covered with red clay tile.

Old Barn/Stable: Gable roof covered with red clay tile.

Connecting roof: Flat roof covered with foam.

b. Cornice, eaves:

New Barn/Shed: Decoratively carved rafter ends on the south facade only.

Old Barn/Stable: Decoratively carved rafter ends on north and south facades only.

Connecting roof: The parapet walls on the east and west have been tiled.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Each barn has a linear arrangement of rooms. See measured drawings.

2. Flooring:

New Barn/Shed: The western section has a hard-packed dirt floor. The eastern portion contiguous with the covered driveway has a concrete floor.

Old Barn/Stable:

Grain Room/Plumbing Shop: Concrete floor.

Stable/Curatorial Storage: Hard dirt and gravel floor.

Passage Room/Curatorial Storage: Concrete floor.

Harness Rooms/Curatorial Storage: Concrete floor scored to simulate tile.

Lumber Room/Maintenance Shop: Concrete floor.

Shelter/Locker Room: Concrete floor.

Covered Driveway: Hard-packed dirt floor.

3. Wall and ceiling finish:

New Barn/Shed: Interior walls are all unplastered. Ceiling timbers were originally darkened with creosote but have faded over time.

Old Barn/Stable:

Grain Room/Plumbing Shop: Decoratively plastered. All ceiling members have been darkened with creosote.

Stable/Curatorial Storage: All the walls have been plastered but have been left unfinished. All ceiling members have been darkened with creosote.

Passage Room/Curatorial Storage: All the walls have been decoratively plastered . All ceiling members have been darkened with creosote.

Harness Rooms/Curatorial Storage: All the walls and ceiling have been decoratively plastered.

Lumber Room/Maintenance Shop: All the walls have been plastered and left in the rough without a finish coat. Ceiling members have either lost their creosote covering over time or were originally left bare.

Shelter/Locker Room: All the walls have an interior plaster finish similar to the finish found on the exterior of most buildings at Scotty's Castle, making it evident that it was once open to the outside.

4. Doorways and doors:

New Barn/Shed: Electrical shop has a plain wooden door painted gray.

Old Barn/Stable: All the doors and doorways were designed by MacNeilledge and made by carpenters on the site. They are all made of wooden slabs that are connected with tongue-and-groove construction and fastened together by wooden battens on the inside and hand-forged metal strap hinges on the outside. The wood in most cases has been darkened with an alcohol blow torch to give it an "antique" appearance. Elements unique to each room will be described below.

Passage Room to West Harness Room: There are two doors in this entrance. The first is a dutch-style door with open wooden bars in the upper half. This door was installed by the National Park Service in 1976. A dutch door could control access but allow the saddles and harnesses to be exhibited to the public. The upper half with wooden bars has been fitted with plexiglass to help maintain atmospheric conditions proper for curatorial storage. The second door is similar to the one between the stable and the passage room.

West Harness to East Harness Room: The East Harness Room differs from all the others in that it does not have an open ceiling. Rather it has a flat ceiling and a hay loft above. A hayloft door opens from it into the west harness room.

Lumber Room/Maintenance Shop to Shelter/Locker Room: A large sliding door, similar to those found on the exterior elsewhere, with keyhole-like cutouts.

5. Decorative features:

Old Barn/Stable:

Stable/Curatorial Storage: Hay trough runs the length of both the north and south walls. The south wall has a feed trough for grain mounted on it about 4' from the ground.

Passage Room/Curatorial Storage: A moose head is mounted above the door to the harness room and an elk head is mounted over the door to the stable/curatorial storage. Wooden saddle mounts and metal harness nooks are mounted shoulder-height along the east and west walls of the Passage Room. A large lantern with amber glass is hung with a chain from the center of the ceiling.

D. Site:

1. General Statement: The stable complex is the easternmost structure within Death Valley Scotty Historic District. Its site has been partially carved out of a solid rock embankment to the north and northeast. Storm water drainage has always been a problem because of it.

The stable is approximately 400 yards east of the Main House/Annex. A connecting road climbs up Grapevine Canyon from the Main House/Annex to the Stable at first a 2% and then a 7% grade. The road follows the same east-west orientation established by the canyon. This in turn establishes the main axis for each of these major structures and for the Ranch complex as a whole.

2. Historic Landscape Features: To the south of the Old Barn was a large corral that extended approximately three times farther to the east than the length of the barn itself and approximately half that distance to the south. The corral system included a hay storage platform made of railroad ties and a wooden corral with a chute. Both of these features were lost in a fire in 1978.<sup>25</sup>

The area is presently overgrown with weeds and encroaching vegetation. A section of it is now used as a vegetable garden for TW Services, the local concessionaire, and National Park Service employees. Some 8' concrete posts with the characteristic brand of circle J and circle S have been reconstructed by National Park Service employees at the approximate spot an original fence once stood.<sup>27</sup> Those that are still in place range from good to poor in condition. Some sections of woven wire fencing have also been reconstructed.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The repository of nearly all of the sources of information is the Reference Library and Preservation Office, Scotty's Castle, Death Valley National Monument, California. Individual references take the form of endnotes, as follows:

1. See architectural drawings signed by A. M. Johnson and dated 11/15/24, catalogue nos. 21290, 21293, and 21310.
2. See photographs dated 1926, presently on file in the library of Deep Springs College, Deep Springs, California.
3. Letter from Charles Alexander MacNeilledge to Albert M. Johnson dated August 19, 1927. Manuscript 5, box 1.
4. Letters from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated January 8, 14, 22, and 27. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 6.
5. Letters from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated March 6, 10, 17, 30 and 31, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
6. Letter from Charles Alexander MacNeilledge to H. B. Brown, dated June 20, 1929. Manuscript 7, box 21.
7. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Rubens Caraselli dated June 21, 1929. Manuscript 7, box 21.
8. Architectural drawings, catalogue nos. 21289, 21293, and 21310.
9. Susan J. Buchel, "Scotty's Castle was Not His Home" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1985), pp. 52-53.
10. "I think the sketch of the new shed is all right and we will go ahead and excavate for same as soon as we start up, and the new building can be built along the lines of your sketch, as we need that at as early a date as possible for storage; and the old building and overhead bridge connecting the two can be reconstructed and built at a time that is most convenient and will fit in best with the other construction work." Letter from Albert M. Johnson to Charles Alexander MacNeilledge, dated August 8, 1927. Incoming Correspondence, Manuscript 5, Box 1.

11. See architectural drawings, catalogue nos. 21289, 21292 and 21310.
12. Photographs on file in the library of Deep Springs College, Deep Springs, California.
13. Album # 13732, photo # 1519.
14. Letters from Albert M. Johnson to Charles Alexander MacNeill dated November 15 and 22, 1927. Manuscript 5, box 1.
15. Architectural drawings, catalogue nos. 21289, 21290 and 21310.
16. The only major revision in the plan was that the large central pass-through was divided in half in order to create a second harness room.
17. Letter from M. Roy Thompson to Albert M. Johnson dated June 6, 1929. Outgoing correspondence, manuscript 7, box 7.
18. Historic Buildings File. Record Group 1, box 6. For more about the "Watercourse," see overview in HABS No. CA-2257.
19. Ibid.
20. Conversation with National Park Service electrician Bob Terrel, an employee with Scotty's Castle since 1976. July, 1987.
21. Historic Buildings File. Record Group 1, box 6.
22. Historic Buildings File. Record Group 1, box 6. Conversation with George Voyta and Don Creech on July 28, 1987. A photographic inventory done just after the National Park Service accepted ownership of Scotty's Castle has three photographs of the shelter when it was still open. The photographs were taken by Edward Jahns and can be found in "Physical Inventory of Contents: Stables and Environs..." and is on file at the Reference Library at Scotty's Castle.
23. Historic Buildings File. Record Group 1, box 6.
24. Historic Buildings File. Record Group 1, Box 6. Conversation with Don Creech, July 31, 1987.
25. Conversation with Don Creech, August 1987.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Scotty's Castle Recording Project at Death Valley National Monument, California, was undertaken during the summers 1987-89 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) division of the National Park Service, and co-sponsored by the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of HABS/HAER; Kenneth L. Anderson, AIA, Chief of HABS and project leader in 1987 and 1988; and Paul D. Dolinsky, Principal Architect of HABS and project leader in 1989.

The recording teams were supervised in the field by Marlys B. Thurber in 1987, John White in 1988, and Joseph D. Balachowski in 1989. The written documentation was prepared by Richard A. Bernstein of Cornell University in 1987.

ADDENDUM TO:  
DEATH VALLEY RANCH, BARN (STABLES)  
Death Valley National Park  
Death Valley vicinity  
Inyo County  
California

HABS No. CA-2257-D  
*CAL,14-DVNM,1-D-*

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National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
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Washington, DC 20240

ADDENDUM TO:  
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Death Valley Junction vicinity  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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